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CHALLENGE

FIGHT FOR COMMUNISM • LUCHE POR EL COMUNISMO • PLP

THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST NEWSPAPER OF PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY

Mis-leading Workers and Youth:

Obama Spurs Rulers' War Agenda



Swelling support for Barack Obama is a two-sided phenomenon. On one hand, it reflects the sincere but misdirected anti-war, anti-racist aspirations of millions of people. On the other, it marks a concerted ruling-class effort to win these millions to the electoral system and thus to implicitly back U.S. imperialism. Communists should work among these masses to turn this around.

So whom does Obama serve, and what's his agenda? A big hint comes from arch-imperialist Paul Volcker's recent endorsement of Obama. Chief economist at Chase bank, director of the Rockefeller-led Trilateral Commission, Federal Reserve chairman who put millions out of work by jacking up interest rates to 20% to bail out bankers in the 1980s, Volcker hopes Obama's "leadership...can restore confidence in our vision, our strength, and our purposes right around the world." (Wall Street Journal, 1/31/08)

FOR LIBERAL IMPERIALISTS: OBAMA BEST ASSET IN 50 YEARS

Volcker exemplifies U.S. rulers who — facing inevitable clashes with regional rivals like Iran and global ones like China and Russia — need to mobilize and militarize millions of people. Obama, with his broad appeal to young students and workers, is giving the war-makers invaluable help. Robert Putnam, from Harvard's Kennedy School, a top imperialist policy factory, writes, "Primaries and caucuses...in the last two months have evinced the sharpest increase in civic engagement among American youth in at least a half-century, portending a remarkable revitalization of American democracy." (Boston Globe, 3/2/08) He could have said more honestly, "of the U.S. war machine."

Crediting, both the "extraordinary" Obama campaign and 9/11 for the upturn, Putnam calls the new crop of voters a second "Greatest Generation." He likens them to the tens of millions who, whether enlisted or drafted, fought fascism in World War II. The capitalists Putnam represents (the Ford, Getty, Carnegie, and Rockefeller foundations bankroll his "civic engagement" program at Harvard) hope voting will boost patriotism and, ultimately, troop strength.

HARVARD PROF BACKING OBAMA GIVES THANKS FOR 9/11 SLAUGHTER

Near the end of, and after, the Vietnam War, the rulers tried several tactics to control youth. They dropped the voting age to 18 in 1972. Some bought it. That year 52% of 18- to 24-year-olds voted, while millions received a steady diet of drugs and other aspects of a dead-end "do-your-own-thing" culture. In fact, with war out of the way temporarily, youth apathy pleased the bosses. Youth rates of voting in presidential elections fell steadily throughout the '70s, '80s and '90s, reaching barely 36% in 2000. But by then China had emerged, and Russia reemerged, as serious U.S. foes. U.S. bosses now needed major sources of cannon fodder.

As Putnam notes, "Then came the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001... a tragedy, but also the sort of opportunity for civic revival that comes along once or twice a century.... In the 2004 and 2006 elections, turnout among young people began at last to climb after decades of decline." Like the rulers' pre-9/11 Hart-Rudman Commission reports, Putnam welcomes terrorist mass murder as an aid in "galvanizing" the U.S. for global war. But, as motivators, 9/11s and Pearl Harbors, however useful, wane over time. They must be sustained by a Roosevelt-style, media-fueled charisma that mis-leads workers into voting booths, against their class interest.

'BARRACKS' OBAMA FIRES AIDE WHO LEAKED WAR PLANS

Putnam's — and U.S. imperialism's — reputed savior, Obama has a long history of luring people of military age into the system. His "Project Vote" in Chicago in the 1990s registered over 100,000 young first-time voters. Obama, who promises to add 92,000 soldiers to the Army immediately, has participated in the Seminar on Civic Engagement that Putnam leads at Harvard.

Pretending to be the "Out-of-Iraq" peace candidate, Obama supports the war agenda just as much as Clinton and McCain do. He recently fired a foreign policy advisor, Samantha Power, for letting that cat out of the bag. (Power, another Kennedy School guru, specializes in disguising military invasions as "humanitarian interventions.") On March 6, a BBC reporter asked her: "So what the American public thinks is a commitment to get combat forces out in 16 months isn't a commitment?" Power's answer: "You can't make a commitment in March 2008 about what circumstances will be like in January of 2009."

Yes, Obama's voting numbers present us an opportunity because they show that young people are now less cynical and more open to "talking politics." But just what politics is crucial. The highly politicized Hitler Youth weren't cynical. Many earnestly hoped for the better world Nazi imperialism claimed to offer. And Hitler, after all, professing "socialism," was able to rally many well-meaning people seeking change to support German industrialists' deadly schemes for territorial expansion.

Unless we actively participate in Obama's campaign and expose his true purposes, any Obama success at the polls will prove deadly to the working class. The fatally deceptive optimism he sells masks imperialist objectives that are the exact opposite of PLP's working-class program. Our long-term goals are waging a revolution to destroy the profit system and its endless wars and making a communist-led working class the rulers of society.✪

Obama's Phony 'Anti-War' Roots

Obama mirrors both the rulers' phony anti-war candidates McCarthy (1968) and McGovern (1972) as well as that era's pro-capitalist, pacifist civil rights misleaders. McCarthy drew thousands of youth into his "anti-Vietnam War" campaign and actually forced the rulers to dump incumbent Lyndon Johnson. But the war went on. In 1972, McGovern again brought thousands of young people around his "anti-war" candidacy, but that effort didn't end the war either.

When masses were in motion then, demanding change, PLP exposed the imperialist political content of those movements. Politics are primary.✪

Vets Must See Imperialism Can Only Bring War

The Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) are holding a Winter Soldier's Conference, presenting vets' and Iraqi and Afghan workers' testimony of U.S. imperialism's war atrocities. It is modeled after testimony of U.S. war crimes in Vietnam presented by Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) in 1971. ("Winter Soldier" is drawn from the mutiny of "poorly-clothed, badly-fed, and worse-paid" soldiers, many re-deployed, at Valley Forge in the winter of 1776. They demanded and won full pardon, money, food and supplies and discharges for the re-deployed.)

While many activists want to re-invigorate the U.S. anti-war movement, some IVAW leaders want to use Winter Soldier — stressing voting, lobbying and direct action — to pressure politicians "to think twice" about launching "unjust" wars. But Vietnam vets' testimony in 1971 couldn't prevent virtually non-stop wars afterwards, in Latin America, Africa, the Mid-East and Europe. U.S. rulers spent billions to wage proxy and direct wars to compete with Soviet, European and Asian rivals.

Blaming "bad policy" and politicians just paves a path for wider wars. Fighting imperialism requires attacking its root — capitalism — with its violent competition amongst the bosses driving to maximize power and profits. Eventually ending such wars requires building a mass international communist party and a red army to smash the bosses' state power with workers' power — a world without profits.

During World War I, the Russian communist Bolsheviks organized soldiers on the front-lines and led workers, students and soldiers to turn imperialist war into class war. Instead of "pressuring" the Russian rulers to stop fighting, the Bolsheviks organized millions, including soldiers on the front lines, to throw out the imperialist war-makers and build a workers' state. Organizing working-class troops into a red army is crucial to ultimately smashing the imperialist warmakers.

Winter Soldier has the potential to encourage anti-war organizing amongst troops. IVAW's leader has called on soldiers to withdraw their support for the Iraq war. But much more is needed. PLP says we must fight to destroy the cause of these endless imperialist wars: that means organizing for communism.

In Vietnam, troops participated in mass protests, mutinied and "fragged" (killed) their officers in opposing the war and racism. Now, 35 years later, comes another Winter Soldier testimony to hold the rulers "accountable" again! Organizing conscientious objectors, refusing missions and counter-recruitment actions can be useful, but which class's politics are in command — the workers' or the bosses' — is primary.

To "save GIs' lives," U.S. officers in Iraq lead "search and avoid" missions to minimize risking U.S. troops' lives while patrolling — but instead favor leveling whole cities and everyone in them! Opposing the war only because it's "dangerous for troops" is a racist and sexist attack on Iraqi workers and encourages genocide. Iraqi women and children are disproportionately killed by air strikes; military-age Iraqi males are targeted for detention and execution.

Today, some U.S. soldiers, influenced by communist politics, are leading fight-backs against the command's orders, but also struggle to win fellow troops to the need for communist revolution, anti-racism and anti-sexism. Troops may resist war, but unless their resistance is part of the struggle for communism the bosses will use their grip on state power to reverse any gains we may achieve.

"Patriotic concern for the troops" still leaves us under imperialist leadership. Winter Soldier's panel on how the occupation of Iraq "hurts the military" echoes the complaints of one faction of the U.S. ruling class. U.S. generals and Democrats complain of a "broken force," worrying about keeping the military ready for other, larger, future wars. Some veterans and troops are upset about multiple rotations into combat and call for "sharing the burden" among the U.S. population, a position Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton both support, with calls for "national service" and increased troop numbers.



These liberal Democrats are preparing for wider wars. Their job is to defend the U.S. ruling class against workers and rival bosses. Both Obama and Clinton support the Democrat Carter Doctrine: using military force to guarantee U.S. access to, control of, and profit from Persian Gulf oil. Obama says he's "open" to keeping troops in Iraq for years, if necessary. While the NY Times reports the number of civilians killed in Afghanistan is "alarmingly high,"

Obama promises to redeploy more U.S. troops to Afghanistan. The recently-announced increase in U.S. covert operations in Pakistan will continue, no matter who's president.

Liberal U.S. anti-war leaders want us to believe that the problem is just Bush, the neo-cons and McCain. With "democracy" and the Constitution, people can vote, lobby or "protest their way to peace." PLP will work in Winter Soldier to expose the ruthlessness of capitalism.

As U.S. rulers contemplate their self-described "long war," PLP is organizing troops, vets and military families for the long struggle for communism. Our class needs more fight-backs that build anti-racist, anti-sexist and international working-class unity to smash the bosses' dictatorship, not patriotic peace movements for a "more humane" capitalist/imperialist-run country. Fight for communism!✪

WHAT WE FIGHT FOR:

✯Progressive Labor Party (PLP) fights to smash capitalism — wage slavery. While the bosses and their mouthpieces claim "communism is dead," capitalism is the real failure for billions all over the world.

✯Capitalism returned to the Soviet Union and China because socialism failed to wipe out many aspects of the profit system, like wages and division of labor.

✯Capitalism inevitably leads to wars. PLP organizes workers, students and soldiers to turn these wars into a revolution for communism — the dictatorship of the proletariat. This fight requires a mass Red Army led by the communist PLP.

✯Communism means working collectively to build a society where sharing is based on need. We will abolish work for wages, money and profits. Everyone will share in society's benefits and burdens.

✯Communism means abolishing racism and the concept of race.

✯Communism means abolishing the special oppression of women workers.

✯Communism means abolishing nations and nationalism. One International working class, one world, one Party.

✯Communism means the Party leads every aspect of society. For this to work, millions of workers — eventually everyone — must become communist organizers. Join Us!

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CAPITALISM KILLS: 72,000 GI CASUALTIES; MILLION IRAQI DEATHS

The GI casualty figure is the latest lie uncovered about the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Pentagon reports the number of wounded somewhere in the teens (including nearly 4,000 dead in Iraq). But Veterans for Common Sense (VCS) says the Defense Department only releases one category of battlefield casualty, those "wounded in action" by a bullet, shrapnel or knife.

"A GI who cracks his head on the windshield of his Humvee in a crash, though he may have suffered brain damage and had to be evacuated… is considered 'injured,' not 'wounded,'" says VCS head Paul Sullivan, a Gulf War I vet. Government figures released to the media don't include such casualties. Sullivan's Freedom of Information Act request revealed that through January 5, 2008, U.S. battlefield casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan totaled 72,000.

A GI suffering a heart attack or severe emotional collapse is considered "ill," not "wounded," never entering the official casualty count.

Sullivan, a former Veterans Administration (VA) project manager, blew the whistle on inadequate vets' health care long before the Washington Post "broke" the story. The VCS reports that "VA hospitals and clinics have already treated 263,909 'unplanned' patients" and 245,034 "unanticipated" disability claims from veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Sullivan expects an eventual 700,000 patient claims.

Meanwhile, a leading British polling group, the Opinion Research Business, recently reported 1.03 million Iraqi deaths. (Reuters, 1/30/08) That figure omits three of Iraq's 18 provinces, two of which are among the country's most volatile, Kerbala and Anbar. But U.S. rulers completely ignore Iraqi deaths.

Such is the destruction of human lives wrought by U.S. imperialism in its drive to control oil supplies and other resources and maintain profits, battling its capitalist rivals.✪

Teachers' Strike On Hold, Fight 'Rat' Rivera

SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO, March 5 — After a 10-day militant strike, 10,000 teachers held a mass meeting at the Roberto Clemente Coliseum and agreed to the proposal of Rafael Feliciano, president of the FMPR (Federation of Teachers of Puerto Rico) for a temporary suspension of the strike in order to evaluate the weaknesses and strengths of their struggle without surrendering the right to strike again.

The strike included many mass actions, street marches of thousands, militant picket lines, battling vicious attacks by riot cops and confronting the gang-up of the Dept. of Education (DOE) bosses, governor Aníbal Acevedo Vilá and a court order to decertify the union for violating the anti-strike Law 45.

The strikers also had to deal with backstabbing by international union hacks like Dennis Rivera, vice-president of the SEIU "Change to Win" Federation and former president of NYS Local 1199 of the Hospital Workers Union. He lunched with Governor Vilá to urge decertification of the FMPR in favor of an SEIU union. During a mass rally, when a speaker called Rivera a "vulture," striking teachers repeatedly chanted, "He's a rat."

The strikers did win a $150-a-month wage hike on top of a $100 monthly increase agreed upon last year. While the cost of living here is much higher than in the U.S., teachers' starting pay here is $19,200-a-year, much lower than any U.S. school district. The DOE agreed not to punish any striking teachers "except those involved in criminal activities" (it was the cops who criminally attacked strikers) and to put on hold the privatization of many public schools (the DOE's plan to make the 500,000 public school students and their working-class parents pay even more for the rotten conditions).

The strikers received support from other workers and students here, many of whom joined the marches and other activities during the struggle. A mass student meeting at the Univ. of Puerto Rico Río Piedras campus organized a 24-hour strike to support the teachers. Scabbing "dissidents" had little mass support among the teachers but got a lot of coverage in the bosses' media. And the opportunist leadership of the National Hostos Independence Movement issued a press release backing the bosses.

In the U.S., the strikers won support from both college and public school teachers. (See adjacent article on support from the City University of NY Professional Staff Congress union). The March 5 Delegate Assembly of the NYC United Federation of Teachers (UFT), with 92,000 members, also unanimously passed a solidarity resolution "to support the Puerto Rican teachers in their struggle to be treated with dignity." But the UFT leadership gave no real support to the strikers.

On March 4, the Puerto Rican Federal Affairs Agency in Manhattan was picketed, backing the strikers. PLP teachers participated in these support actions, and distributed a PLP leaflet in NYC and L.A. supporting them.

The strike was more than a trade union struggle; it was a political fight-back against the rulers' strike-



breaking Law 45 (similar to the U.S. Taft-Hartley and NY State Taylor Laws which forbid public workers' strikes). It also fought the colonial-master politics of the Change to Win and AFL-CIO hacks, as well as the brutal repression by the "shock police."

The strike demonstrated that, despite all the odds, these teachers dared to fight back in a day and age when so many workers accept the bosses' attacks that make us pay for their economic crisis and endless wars (the death rate of soldiers from Puerto Rico in the Iraq war is very high). But it also showed the limitations of reform struggles.

Workers must turn these battles into schools for communism, learning how to forge a revolutionary internationalist movement to carry on the long-range fight-back for a world without vicious cops, union traitors and capitalist-imperialist oppressors. That's the goal of workers' power — communism — that PLP fights for. Join us! ✪

CUNY Faculty Union Supports Puerto Rico's Strikers

NEW YORK CITY, March 6 — The February 25 Delegate Assembly of the City University's Professional Staff Congress (PSC) voted unanimously to "participate in strike support and solidarity efforts on behalf of the striking teachers of the FMPR [Puerto Rico's teachers' union]." Delegates contributed $700 on the spot, and quickly organized a network for strike support on the campuses. Fifty PSC'ers took 7,000 flyers and petitions to union colleagues and students on at least half of CUNY's 20 campuses. Another $900 was raised by PSC leaders at a board meeting of the state teachers' union body.

Class unity across borders is essential for teachers and all workers, so PL members and friends in the PSC took the lead organizing strike support on the campuses. Exclusive focus on economic gains for a single union's members is a loser for all workers because it isolates us from each other. We need to combine struggle for our own demands with equal efforts to build international working-class unity and class consciousness, to win workers to PLP.

This struggle will remain a significant political one among PSC leaders and activists for some time. While all are sympathetic to the striking teachers, there is disagreement about priorities: amid a tough PSC contract campaign and an uphill battle for more State funding, should we spend time and resources on FMPR strike support?

PLP members and friends and other PSC'ers answered that question with a mass approach, working hard on the campuses to persuade our colleagues and students how vital it is to support our fellow teachers in a bitter struggle. We were not deterred by comments like, "I wish you'd spend this kind of energy on the contract campaign!" Some were anxious about relations with other unions "if we got too far out front" supporting the FMPR, which disaffiliated from our national union, and is being raided by SEIU VP Dennis Rivera. But we persisted, getting a warm response from CUNY students, especially those entering teaching and those from Latin America.

One cafeteria worker urged others to sign the petition, exclaiming, "This is to liberate my people!" And all workers, we told him. One signer was a union chapter leader in his high school.

We used different tactics: tabling, roving the cafeteria, faculty distributing flyers to their classes, getting signatures and donations in department meetings. We proved that relying on the masses of PSC'ers and students to express their international solidarity with the strikers was the way for revolutionaries to work in reform struggles, not as some sectarian groups do, saying some apparently "correct" things but building no base among the mass of workers.

Self-critically, comrades in the PSC know we must intensify our efforts amid these kinds of struggles to build the Party itself at CUNY. The Party is the essential weapon to win, not reform demands to be reversed by capitalists' state power, but win all workers' liberation — communism.

We've recently had two CUNY PLP forums, one on racism and another on immigration, each attracting 30 or more faculty and students. We've also expanded CHALLENGE readership and study groups, have collected $800 worth of new subscriptions. We're planning a Party newsletter at CUNY, and winning some friends closer to joining, but we have more to do. Time presses: the whole world is a tinder box leading to a major imperialist war. Teachers in Oaxaca and Puerto Rico have taught us a good lesson in fighting capitalism: "¡Lucha sí! ¡Entrega no!" Struggle yes, surrender no! ✪

'Need Bloodshed to Bring Changes'

CHICAGO, IL February 29 —"Why are all these people clapping? This isn't a victory! It's an assassination of the working class. It's going to take bloodshed to get the kind of changes we need!" That's what a black worker with 30 years at the County hospital said about the new funding "compromise" reached by the Cook County Board of Commissioners. They agreed to raise the sales tax in return of giving up control of the Bureau of Health services to an "independent," more professional Board of Directors.

The applause she was referring was coming from the SEIU, AFSCME and NNOC (Nursing) union leaders, and the Medical Staff (doctors), who fell in line behind the racist budget cutters Stroger and Simon, and claim to have saved the County healthcare system! The County hasn't been "saved." It is more than half-closed. All the school-based clinics are closed, Provident is downsized and Oak Forest decimated. Patients wait in the ER for more than 24 hours for a bed on the overcrowded wards while inpatient beds are closed because the bosses cut more than 2,000 jobs. The Stroger pharmacy is down to one shift, patients aren't getting discharge medications, and poor mostly black and Latin women wait months to get urgently needed tests after abnormal Pap smears.

Patient visits dropped by more than 100,000 after last years' cuts, and there are more than 1.2 million uninsured in Cook County. The County patient population is 82% black and Latin. Like home foreclosures, lay-offs, rotten schools and overcrowded jails, black, Latin and immigrant workers are taking the bulk of these racist health care cuts. The $2 billion-a-week war economy is balanced on the backs of the poorest, most vulnerable populations.

And all the talk about a "more professional Board" running the County "more efficiently" is the new language of fascist healthcare. We should find no satisfaction that the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club, the Chicago Federation of Labor or liberals from the Health and Medicine Research Group are going to be governing the Health Bureau. The only reform coming our way is increasing and expanding wars, racism and fascist terror.

The "independent governing board" was called for by the Northwestern University report issued about three years ago. The authors reflected the dominant ruling class outlook and included Michelle Obama, who pulls in $300,000 sitting on the Board of University of Chicago Hospitals. Cook County workers and patients are about to get perhaps a taste of what Obama's healthcare plan really is.

We can't reform the racist profit system. We need communist revolution to, as the worker said, get what we need! No interim governing board of bosses and union hacks, or Democratic Party candidates can bring about that kind of "change." PLP has been the only force exposing this "compromise" charade, moving some workers into action and standing up to the bosses and union hacks. CHALLENGE is reaching a few more eager hands and we are gearing up to bring workers and patients to May Day. ✪

Deal Averts South American Oil War....For Now

A March 7 Latin-American presidential summit meeting temporarily settled the crisis caused by Colombia's bombing and subsequent murder by Colombian commandos of Raúl Reyes, a leader of the Colombian FARC guerrilla movement, and others, sleeping inside Ecuador territory. The Presidents of Venezuela (Chávez), Colombia (Uribe) and Ecuador (Correa) shook hands on a deal which Uribe was forced to make (for now) because his attack isolated his government in Latin America (only Bush, McCain, Obama and Hillary Clinton supported this aggression). But the deal didn't solve the contradictions bringing the three countries to the verge of regional war.

The $5 billion in U.S. aid under Plan Colombia/Patriot (begun under Clinton and continued by Bush) has armed Uribe and the Colombian Army to the teeth. It's now second to Brazil as the most powerful military in South America. Hundreds, if not thousands, of U.S. and Israeli military and intelligence advisors, and private Pentagon mercenaries, are involved. U.S. electronic snooping operating from three bases inside Colombia guided the murder of the FARC guerrillas.

Uribe has become the U.S. rulers' main ally in the region. While U.S. aid was supposed to fight the drug cartels, Colombia has basically become a narco-death squad state. Dozens from Uribe's own party are either accused of, or in jail for, their link to the drug-dealing paramilitary death squads. On March 6, marches were held in many Colombian cities, and in other countries, protesting these murderous paramilitary forces.

Colombia is the most dangerous place worldwide for union members. Thousands of workers and others have been killed for trying to organize workers, peasants and youth. U.S. companies — Chiquita Brands, Coca-Cola, Occidental Petroleum, Drummond Mining — have paid these death squads to kill union activists.



Above, people holding pictures of people who have disappeared or have been killed by death squads

Washington's aid to the Colombian government is basically part of U.S. imperialism's global war for control of oil supplies. Venezuela is the main target because, along with Mexico, it's the key Western Hemisphere oil supplier to the U.S. (Ecuador is also an important oil producer, with investments from Chevron-Texaco and Brazil's Petrobras).

Guillermo Almeyra reported (La Jornada, Mexico, 3/9) Shell Oil's expectation that oil production by PEMEX (Mexico's state-owned monopoly) will diminish, so Venezuela's oil becomes even more important for the U.S. But Chávez is dealing with Russia, China, Iran and India. Exxon Mobil is suing Venezuela's state-owned oil company PDVSA in an international court for not paying enough for its lost Venezuelan oil holdings. This makes Chávez a target for the U.S. oil-war strategy.

Uribe and his U.S. masters don't like Chávez's positive international image after he mediated FARC's release of high-profile hostages. Interestingly enough, France's president Sarkozy was even planning to meet with the murdered FARC leader in Ecuador to work out the release of Colombia's former presidential candidate, Ingrid Betancourt, a French citizen. Colombia's government warned Sarkozy to stay away.

The whole crisis caused much debate in Colombia itself. The bosses and their press pushed nationalism to support war-maker Uribe's government. PLP members and friends were out advancing our Party's internationalist revolutionary politics, attacking both Uribe-Bush and the entire capitalist system, describing how the rulers worldwide spill the blood of workers and youth to fight for their oil profits and imperialist allies.

Many believe Chávez and Correa are the best friends workers can have. But Chávez and Correa, after "denouncing" Uribe as a murderer, shook hands with him at the summit meeting.

Preceding this crisis, Chávez attacked "ultra-leftists" in Venezuela who don't support his policies 100%. One example: workers at Sidor, the country's biggest steel producer (controlled by Technit, an Argentine company) have been fighting for a contract for over a year, demanding better benefits and wages (they're among the lowest-paid steel workers in Venezuela). Chávez's Labor Minister is siding with Sidor bosses as a union-buster and strike-breaker, even though four workers' general assemblies rejected the Minister's intervention in their struggle.

PLP must intensify its political activity, offering the communist alternative, the only way out of the capitalist-imperialist hell of oil war, strike-breaking and death squads.✪

Africa Series Part VI

Rich Become Billionaires, Workers Rebel for Food



In the 19th century, Karl Marx said, "The rich get richer and the poor poorer." Capitalism sure proves it.

Forbes Magazine just announced its latest list of billionaires. This year's worldwide crop of 1,215 is worth $4.4 trillion, up 26% from last year.

Meanwhile, food rebellions erupted in several African countries (Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Morocco, Mauritania, Mozambique, Guinea) as well as in Yemen and Indonesia. Hundreds were killed in Mauritania.

In Cameroon, a cabbies' strike on February 25 protesting high fuel prices sparked the rebellion. It spread across the country. Over 100 were killed and over 1,600 arrested.

The government was forced to grant some wage hikes and other reforms. But Simon Nkwenti of the Teachers' Union Federation said, "For us, these are just cosmetic measures and a non-event. What we want is the restoration of salaries to their pre-1993 levels." (Reuters, 3/8)

Cameroon was once one of sub-Sahara Africa's most successful capitalist countries, but the collapse of its export prices destroyed the economy. In 1993, an International Monetary Fund-imposed austerity package slashed wages 70%. A year later, the CFA (French backed currency) was devalued 50%.

Ironically, today's food crisis is caused by the rising prices of many commodities, including corn used for biofuel. The amount of crops for human or animal consumption has increased up to 7% since 2000, but for biofuel it's 25%. (El País, Madrid, 3/8) The price of wheat, milk and butter has tripled since 2000, chicken, rice and corn cost twice as much.

A system like capitalism and imperialism which cannot feed the hungry while a few live in obscene luxury must be destroyed and replaced with a society based on production for need: communism. ✪

(A future CHALLENGE article will examine biofuel and rise of world hunger.)

Ron Paul:

Appearance, 'Revolution'; Essence, Fascism

Although McCain is the Republican presidential nominee, Ron Paul still has support among some youth. Signs of "Ron Paul for President" appear in some anti-war activities. Paul was googled and seen on Youth Tube more than any other GOP candidate. The so-called Ron Paul "Revolution" attracted some working-class white youth because he opposed the Iraq war, globalization and a national ID system. But the real essence of Paul's program is fascism and racism.

Alex Jones, an Austin, Texas, radio host, Minuteman supporter and leader of the "9/11 Truth Movement" has won some youth to Paul. The Truth Movement argues that 9/11 was an "inside job" perpetrated by Bush to justify war in the Middle-East and impose a police state at home.

But this is just a hook to attract people to Jones and others who spread the anti-Semitic filth of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a 1903 fakery circulated by the Czarist secret police. Henry Ford and Hitler also used the Protocols and racism to deflect working-class anger away from the real enemy, capitalism. Unfortunately, even some fake left-wingers in Latin America and elsewhere have spread the Protocols to give a false explanation of finance capital. (For more on Jones see the current issue of The Communist Magazine.)

Anti-immigrant racism is the real essence of Jones. He says immigration from Mexico is a "globalist" trick to erect a "Communist military dictatorship" in the U.S. Similarly, while Paul rails against a national ID card for citizens, he demands more racist police repression of the inner cities (asserting in 1996 that 95% of black men in Washington, D.C. were "criminals"). On immigration, he calls for a militarized border, intensified efforts to round up the undocumented and new rules to deny citizenship to their U.S.-born children.

At a minimum, the Paul campaign, like Obama's and Clinton's, brings anti-war youth into the electoral system and fascism. Beyond this, they divert youth from an understanding of capitalist exploitation and imperialist rivalries — the basis of all modern wars — into a traditional Nazi ideology that blames elite "conspirators" for the problems capitalism generates.

In 1902, Lenin warned communists not to rely on spontaneity. Workers tend to rebel spontaneously against the ravages of capitalism. But on their own, these struggles won't create the political class consciousness needed to destroy capitalism.

Communists in PLP show that only knowing the historical role of the working class can transform spontaneous anger into the communist class consciousness necessary for revolutionary change. We must become involved with those youth mis-led by Ron Paul, Obama and Clinton, and use CHALLENGE as our ideological weapon to expose these politicians as tools of the racist capitalist war-making system.✪

Axle Strikers Battle 50% Pay-Cut, Slash GM Production



American Axle strikers in Detroit

DETROIT, MI March 11 – The strike by 3,600 UAW workers at five American Axle Manufacturing (AAM) plants is into its third week. This is the latest aftershock in the restructuring of the U.S. auto industry, which has seen starting wages cut in half at GM, Ford and Chrysler at the same time that they have eliminated over 80,000 jobs. This is the result of the sharpening competition between the world's auto billionaires for markets, resources and cheap labor. The U.S. market is under siege by Asian and European auto bosses. U.S. bosses, with the UAW in their pocket, are slashing wages and benefits which took workers 70 years to win.

Actually, it's more like two strikes. The workers are striking against the bosses' demands to cut wages in half, cut health care, and end pensions. The UAW leadership is striking over how much it will cost AAM in buyouts, "buy-downs" (lump-sum payments in return for permanent pay cuts) and other schemes, to get what they want.

"How are we supposed to live like this? Is gas going to be cut in half, or groceries, or our house and car notes? And the company's making profits. They are attacking us to 'stay competitive.'" That's how two black strikers with 15 years at AAM saw it.

The mostly black workforce at the Detroit plant is already struggling to survive in a city ravaged by racism. With soaring unemployment and the highest foreclosure rate in the country, more mouths than ever depend on each and every paycheck. Cutting them in half is devastating.

Meanwhile at Solidarity House, UAW President Ron Gettelfinger said, "Our members cannot be expected to make the extreme sacrifices American Axle is asking for with nothing in return." AAM wants to cut wages in half, increase co-pays for prescription drugs, eliminate vision coverage and freeze pension benefits, replacing them with a 401(k) plan. This would lower overall compensation from $65 an hour to $27, costing AAM workers $200 million a year. It would cut wages to $11.50-$14.50 an hour, matching what the UAW negotiated at Delphi, GM, Ford and Chrysler.

AAM also wants to close some union factories and move the work to non-union plants in the U.S. paying $10.00/hour, and a plant in Mexico paying 70 cents/hour. As of today, the strike has forced GM to shut or cut production at 29 plants, involving over 37,000 workers. This has had a ripple effect closing many supplier plants. Unfortunately, the effects of this have been blunted because GM has a 90-day backlog of unsold cars and sales are even slower at this time of year.

Nevertheless, this shows the potential power we have in our hands. A small number of determined

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Capitalism's Twin Crises Flatten Wages, Jobs

The net U.S. job loss for February was 63,000, the largest falloff since the last recession. (NY Times, 3/7/08) Fifty-two thousand manufacturing jobs and 39,000 construction jobs were wiped out, offsetting small gains in other sectors.

Bush and many bourgeois economists still maintain "there's no recession." Workers know better — polls show more than half say the recession has already begun.

According to Jared Bernstein of the Economic Policy Institute, the labor market has been "clearly infected by the contagion" from capitalism's twin mortgage and financial crises. Workers' wages are even flatter (or dropping) after considering inflation — just what one would expect when unemployment rises. ✪

Racist Super-Exploitation Behind Air Force War Tanker Deal

Recently the Pentagon gave the $40 billion Air Force tanker contract to the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS)/Northrop Grumman partnership over American rival Boeing. EADS the parent company of Airbus will provide sections of their A330 aircraft to be assembled in a new plant to be built in Mobile, Al. This award gives the consortium an inside track on follow-up contracts worth over $100 billion. This surprise decision is intended to slash aerospace workers' salaries; thereby cutting the costs of a vast array of new weapons the Pentagon needs to confront emerging imperialist competitors.

The new Northrop Grumman factory in Mobile will be the first non-union, low-wage major aerospace assembly plant in the U.S. It will employ upwards of 2,000 workers with a network of U.S. suppliers to reach 20,000. Eventually, it will assemble commercial A330 airplanes, which will drive down the wages and cut jobs of French and British Airbus workers. Wages in Alabama are about half those in Boeing's Washington State plants where the 767 is assembled (see plp.org for chart). Meanwhile, "Northrop will subcontract tanker work to 40 Los Angeles plants representing 7,500 workers" (LA Times, 3/8), at the lowest salaries yet--$8-$10/hour. This sets the stage for a two-tier contract at Boeing this summer. Such is the bitter fruit of the long history of racism. (see below)

This Mobile plant advances a long-held Pentagon goal. The generals have blamed high aerospace wages for the huge costs of new weapons systems for some time. Eight years ago, the Pentagon's Defense Science Board proposed that "competitive outsourcing could be the answer" to the bosses' military funding problems (Aerospace Daily, 2/3/2000). With the costs of two wars and emerging imperialists banging at the door, the Pentagon had to up the ante. This contract goes beyond "competitive outsourcing" (re: low-wage, non-union labor) of parts production to low-wage assembly plants.

In this regard, Pentagon officials are in alliance with foreign policy experts from the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR). They admit "if the defining struggle of the twenty-first century is between China and the U.S., China will have the advantage. Their answer is "a revived Western system." (Foreign Affairs, Jan./Feb. 2008) They couldn't be too happy Airbus set up a Chinese A330 assembly line. They want to more closely tie Europe's economy to the U.S. Where countries in Europe will finally line up as the imperialist contradictions sharpen is anybody's guess.

Class War Answer to Bosses' Flag-waving

From the new assembly plant in Mobile, to the hundreds of thousands of mostly Latin workers slaving away in Southern Californian aerospace subcontractors, the Pentagon and aerospace bosses are using racist super-exploitation to rebuild U.S. imperialism's industrial might. As in auto, it will be used to drive down wages and benefits in the traditional union plants. The Boeing union's happy talk about how we can get a "good contract" without striking in September flies in the face of this reality.

Major sections of the 767-based Boeing tanker are also made overseas. The fuselage comes from Japan, the tail from Italy and other pieces from Britain. This hasn't stopped the union from mounting a nationalist campaign. IAM International president Buffenbarger appeared on racist Lou Dobbs — followed closely by IAM-endorsed Washington Senator Murray — to wave the flag. Clinton and Obama soon joined the jingoistic frenzy.

So the choice becomes clear. Wave the flag and ally with the same Pentagon and aerospace bosses that are slashing our wages and benefits or build an anti-racist alliance with super-exploited subcontractor workers — and now assembly workers. As one Boeing Machinist said discussing the above points, "If they want a war, we'll give them a class war!" ✪

Pro-War AFL-CIA Steel Hacks Serve Racist Bosses

CHICAGO, IL, March 5 — Recently the United Steelworkers union (USWA) sponsored a "free dinner" at the Museum of Science and Industry here. Their flyer pushed "fair trade" for U.S. companies; obviously the union "leaders" had more on tap than chicken wings and potato salad.

USWA President Leo Gerard and some of the biggest steelmakers have formed the "Alliance for American Manufacturing" (AAM), supposedly to "keep American jobs in America." But the event was an all-out China-bashing affair. Amid questionable statistics, were reactionary comments such as, "When [U.S. companies] go under, you're not going to see the name of the Chinese factory on your kids' Little League uniform."

Even more menacing was, "These technologies support our military, particularly our soldiers fighting overseas…We simply cannot risk being held hostage to the interests of other countries, especially when they may run counter to our own." Current and former steelworkers were bused in to hear this pro-war, anti-China propaganda. Many such events were held nation-wide.

The AAM website (AmericanManufacturing.org) sounds like a CIA-front — full of anti-China rhetoric with a few words thrown in about health care and pensions to keep it "union." The Executive Director is Scott Paul, a former AFL-CIO lobbyist who degrees in Foreign Service, International Politics and Security Studies from Penn State and Georgetown. Deputy Director Horace Cooper is a former Deputy Director of the CIA-run "Voice of America." Several top leaders sit on Congress's U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, which reports annually on the "national security implications of…trade…between the U.S. and China."

Afterwards, a steelworker commented, "Why do these guys think anyone would stop doing business with China, when they have the cheapest labor and prices? That's what the bosses are always looking for." He's right. Capitalists are forever seeking maximum profits. But globally there's a fierce rivalry among imperialists fighting each other for profits. Chinese capitalists are growing stronger while U.S. capitalists are starting to lose their grip. Ultimately, imperialism leads to war.

As humble servants for the racist bosses, Gerard and the rest of the union hacks are trying to win workers to see China as "the enemy," much as they did with Japan in the '70s and '80s. Bringing in busloads of workers to hear tales about U.S. imperialism's "good old days," and contrasting that with stories about the "evil Chinese" and their unsafe pet food and toys, only serves to build a racist base for war against China. As the U.S. economy weakens and factories close, the drums are beating louder, especially from the major industrial unions in auto, steel and aerospace which handle war production.

We must counter these pro-war AFL-CIA hacks by building a mass base for PLP and communist revolution. This means winning more CHALLENGE readers and sellers among industrial workers, confronting the pro-war union leaders and building for May Day. This will help bring these workers into the Party. ✪

LETTERS

Challenging Anti-Immigrant Ordinances

PLP calls for unity among workers of all nationalities and immigration statuses. We denounce all borders as capitalist inventions to mark rulers' territory against their rivals and as hindrances to workers' international unity. PLP'ers have been active in demonstrations against anti-immigrant laws in the Washington, D.C. area, and most recently testified in support of a pro-immigrant ordinance in Mt. Rainier, Md.

The bosses have been pushing anti-immigrant sentiment, mainly towards Latino workers. Their goal is not elimination of Latino workers, but to isolate them from black and white workers, exposing them to legal repression because of their status, and making them generally vulnerable to the bosses' most vicious exploitation. That explains the bosses' toleration and even support for groups like the Minutemen.

Nearby Washington, anti-immigration measures have passed in Virginia in the towns of Herndon and Manassas and in Loudon and Prince William Counties. Recently, the latter reported they had spent almost their entire "rainy-day fund" (a surplus fund from tax collections) on added police enforcement of anti-immigrant measures!

While there has been some anti-immigrant activity in Maryland, Takoma Park passed an ordinance last October making the town a sanctuary city where police and other municipal employees are forbidden to enforce federal immigration laws. (http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp/dyn/content/article/2007/10/29/AR2007102902241.html)

Similarly, two Mt. Rainier town council members recently introduced an ordinance to welcome immigrants to the town and to bar local police from inquiring about residents' immigration status. PLP members spoke on this ordinance at a hearing of over 100 people, denouncing anti-immigrant sentiment as thinly-veiled racism towards Latino workers and urging passage of the resolution to build anti-racist sentiment in Mt. Rainier. Only five of the 45 town residents who spoke opposed the measure. One supporter talked passionately about the fear that the anti-immigrant movement had instilled in her — and she is a naturalized citizen! Another noted that the term "illegal immigrant" was misleading, since being undocumented was not a criminal offense, but rather an administrative matter.

It was heartening to see the outpouring of support for the immigrants in our community. And the Minutemen, after threatening to attend, stayed away.

The proposed ordinance certainly didn't contain communist content. It emphasized that immigrants would be "more willing to cooperate with police" if they knew their immigration status would not be an issue. But the police are never workers' friends. Supporting closer relations with them is another route towards fascism.

Ultimately, the resolution was tabled because two members of the town council (including the mayor) opposed it and the fifth member ducked. The Washington Post blatantly misrepresented Mt. Rainier sentiment, calling the tabling a "victory" for the anti-immigrant movement rather than being due to the racism of two town council members and the mayor. Nevertheless, the struggle over this small-town ordinance has helped us make some new friends in the broader struggle against racism, not only in our town but in the region as well.

Mt. Rainier Reds

No Matter Who Wins Elections, Workers Lose

"It's the same to me whoever wins the 2009 elections. Anyway, we workers will end up in the same conditions," said a teacher analyzing what workers face here and internationally. The candidates spend millions to bombard workers through the media with lies and false promises.

The Progressive Labor Party organizes workers and youth to understand that our class loses no matter which faction of the ruling class wins this rulers' dogfight for control of state power.

Rodrigo Avila, former National Police chief, is aiming to become the presidential candidate of the fascist ruling Arena Party. Avila, who individually employs more cops than the state police, said on TV that the right-wing must be more "humane" and "share the wealth." He mainly wants us to share the bosses' "cultural and spiritual wealth," maybe giving workers small wage hikes. Some politicians even talk of a kind of "social revolution."

At a March 5 breakfast meeting at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce branch here, U.S. ambassador Charles Glazer called on local bosses and the government to fight crime and judicial corruption, since they affect capitalist investments. Behind this call there is a very harsh hidden agenda for more repression in the guise of "fighting crime."

The ex-guerrilla, but now electoral, FMLN offers no real alternative, just reforms to win a bigger share of capitalism's profits for its bourgeois faction. Chano Guevara, ex-guerrilla leader and now FMLN politician, said, "What this country needs is a Salvadoran model of democracy. Socialism is a utopia that perhaps will never be achieved here." Armando Cortez, another FMLN honcho who was a member of the now extinct Communist Party, said that the elections can produce an "alternative to the neo-liberal capitalist model,…not…seek the destruction of capitalism." Both are leaders of the FMLN veterans of the civil war, even though most vets, now victims of the capitalist "peace" signed years ago, don't agree with these opportunist electoral statements.

The ideas of a real social revolution, for which thousands of workers died, are not "old" and "outdated" as these FMLN hacks say. PLP has always criticized revisionists (fake leftists) for essentially fighting for some form of capitalism from which they grab a share of the exploitation of workers. The FMLN leaders' actions have confirmed this scientific communist analysis of our Party.

In this era of growing capitalist economic meltdown and endless imperialist wars — from the borders of Colombia-Ecuador-Venezuela to Iraq (El Salvador is the only Latin American country with troops supporting the U.S. war in Iraq) — reformist schemes á la FMLN or Bolivarian state capitalism are dead-ends for workers. PLP says don't vote; organize to fight for communism, for workers' power!

A Comrade in El Salvador

Attacks Federal Bureau of Intimidation

Recently, the "non-profit" organization InfraGard organized an all-day conference at our college. InfraGard is a program the FBI developed in 1996 to increase civilian participation in surveillance. It's "an association of businesses, academic institutions, state and law enforcement agencies, and other participants dedicated to sharing information and intelligence to prevent hostile acts against the United States." (See www.infragard.net).

The U.S. government acknowledges that private businesses and schools are the backbone of U.S. capitalism's infrastructure. They're asking these institutions to provide information about "disgruntled employees" and any other "rabble-rousers."

Schools and businesses clearly have a vested interest in sharing information with the FBI to help prevent union struggles, strikes and student activism. From schools and employers, the FBI gains not only a higher quality of surveillance (our bosses know us better than the FBI), but also a storehouse of information free of charge. This is an obvious example of the U.S. government revving up for repression and fascism.

Some students from my school organized to confront these all-day workshops. We produced a leaflet on short notice. A small group distributed them before classes in trying to raise awareness.

A majority of the people on the street were white-collar workers who wouldn't take our leaflet or listen to us speak. Many of the students got discouraged. They had criticisms of the last-minute leaflet (rightly so), and were intimidated to be part of such a small group. However, I left with a lot of confidence. Here's why.

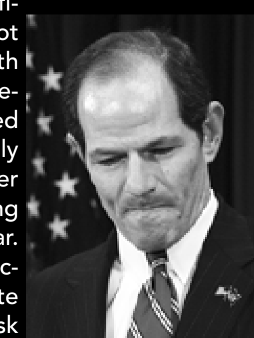
I've been reading CHALLENGE for five years. I enjoy the Letters section, learning about the day-to-day struggles and victories of my class brothers and sisters worldwide. They help sustain my own class-consciousness and prevent discouragement after a tough day at school or work. It can be very alienating to understand capitalism in a way my fellow students and co-workers do not so it's very easy to become discouraged.

Even though only a few of us demonstrated against the FBI's event, it was the right thing to do. Politically, the right things to do are not always popular. Neither the ACLU nor any other organization confronted the FBI that morning. But PLP was there, and knew that this FBI attack on workers needed to be confronted and exposed.

After I left that morning, I talked to my co-workers and classmates about it and even made an announcement in class. I also gave CHALLENGE to a co-worker for the first time. Despite the fact that our event was not perfect, I feel confident knowing that I am working with an organization that has the right politics and is not afraid to stand up to fascism when others fear doing so. The working class worldwide will recognize this, and there will be a day where handfuls of students will be joined by hundreds of workers.

A Student In the Struggle

Spitzer Falls;
Some Rejoice but Empire Will Strike Back



NEW YORK, March 11 —The fiasco that cost New York governor Eliot Spitzer his job has far more to do with politics than prostitution. Decadent behavior is rampant and rarely punished within the exploiting class. What really fuels the scandal is bitter infighting over the direction of U.S. capitalism during a period of widening imperialist war. Spitzer represented the dominant faction of U.S. rulers seeking to subordinate the economy to their war needs. His task was to impose police-state discipline on Wall Street by reining in speculative investment and exorbitant salaries and steering policy and profits in the direction U.S. imperialism required.

Up until now, Spitzer was doing an effective, if heavy-handed, job for the bosses. As state attorney-general and governor he brought down insurance giant AIG, which was too cozy with China's bosses. He hammered Wall Street's biggest firms with fines totaling over $1 billion for shady deals, like Enron, that drained capital from the war effort.

Details will emerge later. But it seems clear that the faction of capitalists opposed to regulation has scored a big hit in attacking Spitzer. The anti-regulation New York Post today spoke of corks popping on Wall Street. The liberal New York Times, however, lamented the loss of a leader for the "reformist agenda." The fight is hardly over. The forces backing empire must and will strike back. The beneficiaries of U.S. control of Mid-East oil have far more at stake than the individual capitalists' mansions and fancy cars. We can expect blood to follow the champagne flowing down the gutters of Wall Street.

Campus PL'ers Expose Racist Cuts, Link to War, Prison System

"These cutbacks on education are racist to the core," a PLP member stated during a campus meeting against the cuts. California has proposed a 10% budget cut to both the California State University (CSU) and UC systems, leaving them $312.9 and $417 million short, respectively. Student fees are projected to rise 10% for the upcoming Fall Quarter in the CSU system. This system has large African-American, Latino, and immigrant populations (many of whom don't qualify for financial aid because of their immigration status). The cuts, a racist attack on these students in particular and all working-class students generally, are part of a series of racist attacks such as the closing of healthcare facilities like King-Drew hospital. Students should unite with workers because we're all bearing the brunt of a society hell-bent on waging profit wars.

Many students are eager to connect campus struggles to the fight against the exploitation of the whole working-class. PLP encourages all students to participate and to push for more mass-actions on and off campuses against the cuts, the war and the prison system. We are struggling to unite students, faculty and staff for system-wide strikes against these attacks. After all it's not just Governor Schwarzenegger and a few administrators; we're up against the capitalist system. This fight could help many see that joining and building a mass communist party is the best way to fight for workers' power in an era marked by fascism and wider imperialist wars.

We're exposing the role of the university under capitalism. While the CSU produces teachers, nurses, and engineers, it also builds false, capitalist ideology. While the educational system teaches students skills, it instills ideas that divide the working-class and disarm us politically, telling us we can escape the ills of capitalism by graduating from the university and "making it."

While the CSU produces 87% of all of California's teachers, it also creates a booming 89% of all of Criminal Justice graduates. The CSU system helps the bosses mobilize students to serve as agents of repression in law-enforcement careers. CSU San Bernardino works with the Department of Defense to commercialize technologies geared towards homeland security. CSULA recently opened a $100 million Crime Lab built in conjunction with the Los Angeles Police and the Sheriff Department. The rulers want to use the CSU system for repression, which most students and faculty oppose.

Some student organizers call for a tax on the rich, as do Obama and Clinton. The liberal ruling class sees that they must direct more profits into war programs and homeland security. They are willing to attack minor bosses' profits to wage more war in defense of imperialism. Without communists putting forward the party's ideas, the bosses and their misleaders can channel the anger of working-class students into illusions in the liberal imperialists while doing nothing to stop the cuts.

Many students who earnestly want to fight against these cuts are being told that the budget cuts are the result of the greed of a few administrators and Governor Schwarzenegger (who certainly are willing servants of the system!), and that just by delivering petitions to Sacramento we can win this fight. With the elections approaching, the misleaders will attempt to mobilize angry working-class students to support Obama or Hillary. Both of these candidates support expanded wars which can't take place without cuts on wages and social services such as education and health care.

By expanding our hand to hand CHALLENGE distributions, we aim to politically equip our friends to see that in the long run, workers and students need to build a movement to destroy capitalism and create a Communist society, free from profit wars, racism, and sexism. CHALLENGE-based study action groups can connect what may seem as an isolated struggle to a capitalist society becoming more ruthless. ✪

Axle Strikers Battle 50% Pay-Cut, Slash GM Output

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workers can shut down a significant part of the industry with ripple effects that go far beyond. If these workers were led by a revolutionary vision of class war, with their eyes on the prize of abolishing wage slavery with communist revolution, this could be the "spark that starts a prairie fire," and the stakes could quickly rise.

But without that revolutionary vision, this strike will be just one more speed bump on the road to fascism, racist terror, poverty and war. PLP is introducing and re-introducing CHALLENGE to some new and old friends on the picket line. We will try to win them to march with us on May Day. This strike is not going to have a happy ending. The good guys are not going to win. The deck is stacked. But by building a base for PLP, we will have a chance to turn a bad thing into its opposite.✪





Below are excerpts from mainstream newspapers that may be of use for our readers. Abbreviations: NYT=New York Times, GW=Guardian Weekly, LAT=Los Angeles Times

Crisis = US imperialism's decline

[The economy's crisis] heralds a major reduction in the global economic and political influence of the U.S. Fundamental systemic crises are often associated with the decline of the dominant imperial power and its increasing inability to sustain the system over which it had presided....

How perceptions of the U.S. have changed: a country living beyond its means, dependent on Asian credit, characterised by huge inequalities, its financial institutions guilty of huge folly. And we are only at the beginning of the biggest geopolitical shift since the dawn of the industrial era. (GW, 2/22)

The 'we' pundits cite ain't us

Whadda you mean "we," Mr. TV Pundit? When you say "we" are doing better in Iraq or, even more absurd, that "we" were right to invade that country in the first place, are you putting Joe Blow American in the same bag as the top officers of Exxon, which made $40.6 billion in profit last year thanks to the turmoil in the energy markets? That royal "we" is good for the royals who control our government, but its persistent use embodies a pernicious lie...

Ever since "we" invaded Iraq, most of us have gotten nothing to show for it other than an enormously increased national debt that we will be paying off for decades to come...

Clearly what's good for big oil is not good for most Americans...

We have been conned since early childhood to look with dark suspicion upon anyone who points a finger of accountability at the robber barons of the corporate world...The U.S.-based oil giants strut with the full confidence that Uncle Sam will back them up.

But who will back up Uncle Sam except ordinary American soldiers and taxpayers who sacrifice to fight and fund battles that have nothing to do with their...interest? (Creators Syndicate, 2/12)

Immigrant crime rate very low

California immigrants, about 35 percent of adults, are far less likely than native-born Americans to commit crimes, according to a study.... Among men ages 18 to 40, native-born Americans were 10 times more likely than immigrants to be incarcerated for crimes in California prisons and jails. The study included both legal and illegal immigrants. (NYT, 2/26)

Poverty can poison brain-power

"Poverty in early childhood poisons the brain."

...Neuroscientists have found that "many children growing up in very poor families with low social status experience unhealthy levels of stress hormones, which impair their neural development." The effect is to impair language development and memory - and hence the ability to escape poverty - for the rest of the child's life. (NYT, 2/18)

Iraqi women's lives worse now

In March 2004 George Bush said that "the advance of freedom in the Middle East has given new rights and new hopes to women...the systemic use of rape by Saddam's former regime to dishonour families has ended." This may have given some people the impression that the American and British invasion of Iraq had helped to improve the lives of its women. But this is far from the case.

Even under Saddam, women in Iraq - including in semi-autonomous Kurdistan - were widely recognised as among the most liberated in the Middle East. They held important positions in business, education and the public sector and their rights were protected by a statutory family law that was the envy of women's activists in neighbouring countries. But since the 2003 invasion, advances that took 50 years to establish are crumbling away.

In much of the country women can only now move around with a male escort. Rape is committed habitually by all the main armed groups, including those linked to the government. Women are being murdered throughout Iraq in unprecedented numbers...

The Iraqi penal code prescribes leniency for those who commit such crimes for "honourable motives..." (GW, 2/22)

There will be bloodied capitalists....

The Academy-award nominated film, "There Will Be Blood," with a spectacular performance by Daniel Day-Lewis, who won Best Actor, is said to be based on Upton Sinclair's 1926 novel, "Oil!" Unfortunately, it is not. The director, Paul Thomas Anderson, borrowed only three aspects of the novel – the setting (southern California), the industry (oil) and the time period (first quarter of the 20th century). He omitted the heart of Sinclair's wonderful book: an exciting and insightful description of the struggle between labor and capital, and the way in which the owners control government, Hollywood and the press for their own ends. It's an unintended and welcome consequence of the film's success that many people are reading 'Oil!"

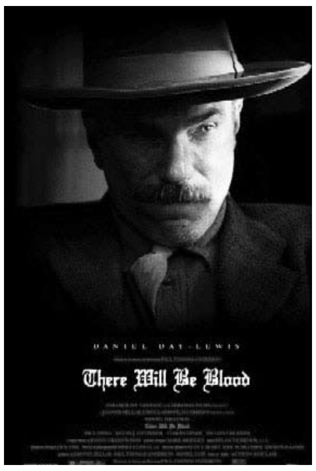
A terrific novel, it follows two main characters – J. Arnold Ross, a self-made, hard-driving owner of several oil fields, a millionaire who only has two interests. One is getting oil out of the ground and making money, and the second is the well-being of his son, affectionately called "Bunny." Father and son care deeply for each other. But as "Bunny" grows up and becomes more socially aware, he becomes close friends with Paul Watkins, a young carpenter who works for Ross Sr. Paul helps lead a strike in the oil fields and is radicalized by left-wing organizers. Bunny is sympathetic to the strikers and begins to listen carefully to Paul's socialist ideas.

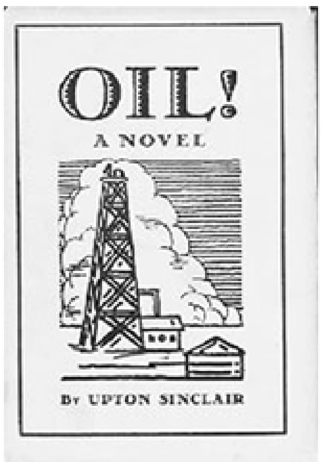
During WWI, the newspapers were filled with crude anti-Bolshevik propaganda, believed by most people. But not by Paul, who sees things clearly from the point of view of the workers:

"Bunny," he said, "do you remember our oil-strike, and what we read about it in the papers? Suppose you have never been to Paradise [an oil field], and didn't know the strikers, but had got all your impressions from the Angel City newspapers! Well, that's the way it seems to me about Russia; this is the biggest strike in history, and the strikers have won, and seized the oil-wells."

Paul, drafted into the U.S. army, is sent to Vladivostok in the Russian far east, part of an intervention by a dozen imperialist armies aimed at helping the Russian aristocracy, the White Army, overthrow the new workers government. His friend comes back in poor health and when Bunny asks what had been the purpose of his expedition, Paul replies:

"I've told you – to break the strike. The biggest strike in all history – the Russian workers against the landlords and the bankers; and we were to put the workers down, and the landlords and bankers up! . . . .[T]hey would get together and call themselves a government, and it was our job to rush them supplies, and they would print money, and hire some adventurers, and grab a bunch of peasants and 'conscript' them, and that would be an army, and we'd move them on the railroad, and they'd overthrow another Soviet government, and slaughter a few more hundreds or thousands of workingmen. That's been my job for the past year and half; do you wonder I'm sick."





Bunny begins to question the capitalist system that was the source of his father's and his own wealth. He comes to realize that there is a war going on every day in the factories and the fields. Describing one oil field and the accidents that occurred there as the men raced to produce more oil and more profits, Sinclair writes:

… of all the thousands of men who had worked here, seventy-three out of every hundred had been killed or seriously injured during the few years of the field's life! It was literally true that capitalist industry was a world war going on all the time, unheeded by the newspapers.

His friend Paul becomes an organizer for the Communist Party, which tells the workers that capitalism needs to be overthrown with revolution. One of Bunny's college friends, Rachel, is a member of the Socialist Party, which tells the workers that capitalism can be peacefully voted out through elections. Although Sinclair gives Paul all the best arguments, Bunny's temperament – which is to avoid conflict – leads him to side with the Socialists, as did Sinclair himself. Yet Sinclair is respectful of the politics and accomplishments of the international communist movement.

This review only touches the surface of this powerful and thoughtful novel, which ends with both personal tragedy and a hope for the future. ✪

Sorry We Can't Spit on Fraser's Grave

DETROIT — Former UAW President Doug Fraser died on February 23 at 91. Fraser's major "contribution" to the labor movement was initiating the period of huge concessions to bail out the bosses. In 1979 he brokered the massive bailout to help Chrysler avoid bankruptcy.

Before that, in 1973, Fraser was the UAW-VP responsible for Chrysler when PLP and the Workers Action Movement led the Mack Ave. Sit-Down Strike. That summer, three wildcats rocked Chrysler, at Detroit Forge, Jefferson Assembly and Mack Stamping. All three involved thousands of black, Latin, Arab and white workers in anti-racist rebellion.

But Mack Stamping was communist-led. It lasted a week, defeating Chrysler security and the Detroit police. Workers and youth from around the city picketed the plant, passing food over the gates to the strikers. A group of workers demanded that UAW Local 212 support the strike and when they refused, workers swept the union hall like a tornado, flattening everyone in their path.

Fraser and the UAW leadership organized a 1,000-man goon squad, armed with baseball bats, to retake the plant. Every man on the UAW payroll in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, including many known KKK members as well as many black staffers hired by the union after 1967, was organized to violently evict the strikers. After the plant was reopened, Fraser directed union reps to walk up and down the aisles with management, fingering any striker for immediate firing.

Having smashed the rebellion, Chrysler was made the target for the 1973 contract talks and a new agreement was ratified with little opposition. This led to Fraser's rise to president in 1977.

He headed the union for six years, when U.S. imperialism was feeling the aftershocks of its defeat in Vietnam. Rising fuel prices and a flood of Japanese imported cars (built in Japan), rocked GM, Ford and Chrysler. As the weakest of the three, Chrysler faced possible bankruptcy.



Fraser came to his masters' aid by inducing Democrat President Jimmy Carter to pass legislation providing $1.2 billion in federally-guaranteed loans for Chrysler. In return, Fraser had Chrysler workers sacrifice $1.2 billion in wage and benefit concessions, including a $3-an-hour wage-cut.

Chrysler Chairman Lee Iacocca nominated Fraser to the company's Board of Directors, who hailed Iacocca as a corporate "hero." But with $3.5 billion in cash, and Fraser and the UAW's help in closing half of Chrysler's plants and eliminating 50,000 jobs, Homer Simpson could have "saved" Chrysler.

Fraser was an "old school" anti-communist his whole union career. He was no novice when he purged PLP after the Mack Sit-Down strike. As administrative assistant to UAW President Walter Reuther in 1951, he helped expel communists from the union throughout the Cold War. Whatever gains he "won" in various contracts are now being stripped away by the wage-cutting, pro-capitalist, patriotic, pro-boss UAW leadership that arose under his command. That's his legacy.

Fraser's body was donated to the Wayne State Medical School. Too bad. Now we won't be able to spit on his grave. ✪

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